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CHAPTER V

THE EFFECTS OF THE NEGRO MIGRATION ON THE SOUTH

As we have noted the immensity, the make-up, and the causes of this movement, we are now justified in seeking to know something concerning its effects upon the South. If this movement had any effects upon the South, these undoubtedly must have been felt first and most in its economic interests; for, as we have seen, the majority of the migrants were laborers who left the farms and industries of this section in response to the great demand for labor in the North. That the South is almost wholly dependent on Negro labor is a truism, because for various reasons it has been unable to obtain any considerable amount of any other kind of labor. Its native white labor supply that is available to perform the menial work is considerably small, and very little of its labor force is drawn from the foreign-born element, which has been coming to this country in such large numbers during the years immediately preceding the beginning of the Great War. In 1910, when a study was made of the distribution of the immigrants to this country, it was found that 84 per cent of them were in the North, 9.7 per cent in the West, whereas only 5.4 per cent of them were in the South.⁷¹ In 1920, 82.9 per cent of the foreign born were in the North, 10.8 per cent in the West, and only 6.3 per cent in the South. We are aware of the fact also that previous to this Negro movement there existed a surplus of Negro labor due to adverse natural conditions in certain parts of the South, and that in order to remove this excess the migration was gladly welcomed. It happened, however, that when this superfluous labor was removed, the migration stream did not stop, but flowed on, and thus swept off a very large part of the labor that was necessary to carry on production on the farms and in the

⁷¹ Fairchild, H. P., *Immigration*, p. 226.

various other industries. We may set down labor shortage, then, as the first effect of the movement upon the South.

Although the South was in direst need of labor as a result of this movement, yet the danger therefrom was not as extensive and serious as it was once thought to be. This labor shortage did not have the effect of plunging the whole section into disaster. For the most part, real hardships were experienced only in certain sections, especially those that had contributed heavily to the movement. From the farming and industrial interests of those States struck hardest by this exodus came many objections to the movement, and these were taken as indications of losses and interruptions in these enterprises. It is said that in every State from the Carolinas to Mississippi there lay idle thousands of acres of land, which would have been put to use had labor been available. Even where good crops had been grown, in many places, there was question as to whether or not sufficient labor could be secured to harvest them.⁷² Again, in some instances, industries like farming had been completely paralyzed; in others they had been greatly retarded, owing to the necessity of breaking in new men to occupy the places of experienced workers who had left for the North. The lumber mills, mines, docks, and cotton oil mills all suffered from the effects of labor shortage.⁷³

As far as this lack of labor affected the South, these facts indicate what was true in a general way; but in order to obtain a better view of the situation let us refer to labor shortage as it existed in a few of the States that were struck exceedingly hard by the migration. A study of the labor situation in Mississippi⁷⁴ showed that while the supply of labor was considerably diminished by the migration, the demand for labor was altered. In some parts of the State the demand was decreased, in others it was increased. In those sections where agriculture

⁷² Williams, W. T. B., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 98.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pages 98-99.

⁷⁴ Leavell, R. H., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., pp. 17-19.

had had time since the invasion of the boll-weevil to reorganize itself on a mixed farming basis, with the emphasis placed on the raising of livestock, the demand for labor was decreased, and the wages were lowest, because this type of farming required less laborers a hundred acres than did the old type which emphasized mainly the raising of cotton. In East Mississippi much land lay idle, but it seemed that the shortage of labor there was due to lack of capital. A heavy migration stream flowed also from South Mississippi and resulted in cutting short the labor supply of the lumber mills and docks. On the whole, labor shortage in this State was quite general, inasmuch as after the movement started employers throughout the State were forced to advance wages from 10 per cent to 25 per cent.

Shortage of labor was a serious problem in Alabama,⁷⁵ especially in those sections of the State designated the "black-belt counties." Throughout these sections during 1917 much land lay idle, partly because of the scarcity of tenants and laborers, and partly because of the reluctance of landowners, merchants, and bankers to supply the capital necessary for cultivating it. The farm demonstration agent of Dallas County reported in 1917 a reduction of 3,000 in the number of plows usually operated. In these same counties farms owned and managed by lumber companies were for the most part deserted and in many cases the crops were given very feeble attention. In all parts of the State the lumber companies complained of a serious labor shortage.

In 1917 it was reported that no acute shortage of labor existed in either the rural or urban districts of Georgia, but that there could be found many instances of individual employers who needed more Negro labor. "If such labor were available," said an investigator, "from 700 to 1,200 (men) could be placed in the saw-mill and turpentine industries at \$1.50 and probably \$2.00 per day; perhaps 2,000 at \$1.75 and \$2.00 per day could be placed in shipbuilding in-

⁷⁵ Snavely, T. R., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., pp. 70-73.

dustries; (and) from 1,500 to 2,000 could be utilized from September to December in picking cotton at \$1.00, \$1.50 and \$1.75 per hundred pounds."⁷⁶

In North Carolina there was a scarcity of labor before the movement got well under way. In 1916 eighty-seven counties out of a total of one hundred counties reported a shortage of labor, and in many parts of the State farmers adopted the plan of raising live-stock instead of agricultural crops. Much land lay idle, and where this was not the case there was a noted increase in the use of farm machinery to supplement the meager labor supply. Especially acute was the demand for cotton pickers. On the whole, the labor situation became so serious that average wages for Negro labor were rapidly advanced beyond those of former times.⁷⁷

What then was the attitude of the South toward that movement? As has been seen, this Negro exodus, by causing a shortage of labor, threatened the economic well-being of many parts of the South. This being so, it is readily seen that those regions so affected could not ignore the movement. In fact, when the pressure was felt, keen interest in the whole matter was aroused and in some cases even much anxiety and apprehension were manifested. In this mood the South directed its attention to this unusual situation and resolved to meet the emergency by stopping the migration itself instead of first trying to remove its causes. In order to accomplish this it was necessary to use force, which was of two kinds, namely, (1) force in the form of moral suasion, and (2) certain devices which rest on physical strength.⁷⁸ The former weapon employed to check the movement took the form of strong and persuasive appeals on the part of Southern newspapers and Southern leaders to Negroes who were either leaving or who anticipated leaving the South. In these appeals the Negroes

⁷⁶ Woofter, T. J., Jr., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 90.

⁷⁷ Snavelly, T. R., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., pp. 73-74.

⁷⁸ Baker, R. S., *World's Work*, 34: 315-16, Je., 1917.

were told that they were better off in the South, that the southern white man was their friend and that living conditions in the North were far more difficult than those in the South. They cited as examples of this the cold climate of the North, the hard and heavy work, and asserted that even though wages in the North were high the cost of living was still higher. The Negroes, therefore, would do well to remain where they were.⁷⁹ In the employment of this weapon to check the movement the newspapers took the lead and carried on a well-organized campaign to frighten the Negroes out of the notion of leaving the South. Some papers carefully circulated false reports to the effect that many Negroes were returning to their homes because of unexpected hardships in the North. Others told of thousands of Negro men dying of cold and hunger in Northern cities, where the climate was so severe that icicles hung from one's nose and ears and one's breath actually turned to snow as it was exhaled.⁸⁰ These appeals and false reports, however, had no effect in checking the movement, and the South, therefore, was compelled to resort to more drastic means in order to achieve its end.

The first repressive move made by the South to check the movement was that against the labor agents of the North, who undoubtedly were the chief instrumentalities through which the migration was kept in operation. The method of procedure was to pass laws which either regulated or prohibited the exodus of laborers through the activity of labor agents. Many States already had such laws on their statute books, and where this was the case these laws were revised or were substituted by new ones.⁸¹ These laws usually took one of two forms, either excessive labor agents' license or requirements of State residence. These were the chief qualifications of any who desired to solicit labor to be employed outside the State so concerned. For the violation of these laws anyone was subject to ar-

⁷⁹ Baker, R. S., *World's Work*, 34: 315-16, Je., 1917.

⁸⁰ Horwill, H. W., *Contemp. Rev.*, 114: 302, Sept., 1918.

⁸¹ Haynes, G. E., *Survey*, 40: 120, May 4, 1918.

rest and upon conviction was either heavily fined or sentenced to terms of imprisonment with hard labor.

A few examples will show how these laws operated against labor agents or against any suspected of enticing labor away from the state. In Alabama, when the labor problem became very acute, laws were passed imposing heavy license fees upon labor agents. Any agent desiring to operate in that State was compelled to pay a license of \$500 to the State and \$250 to each county concerned. In addition, each city required of him a license of from \$300 to \$500. Thus the cost of soliciting labor in Alabama for each agent was upwards of \$1,000. In the "black belt" counties of this state a number of labor agents caught operating in violation of these laws were convicted and heavily fined, and upon failure to pay the same were sentenced to labor on the public roads. The cities and towns of the State of Florida enacted measures requiring a very high license of labor agents and providing the penalty of imprisonment in case of failure to comply with these regulations. In Jacksonville, Florida, for instance, there was passed an ordinance which stipulated that labor agents each should pay \$1,000 license fees for the privilege of recruiting labor to be sent outside of the State. The penalty for violation of this law was \$600 fine and sixty days in jail.⁸² Georgia also passed severe laws to check the operations of labor agents. In Macon⁸⁴ the City Council set the license fee of a labor agent at \$25,000, and required in addition a recommendation of said agent by ten local ministers, ten manufacturers, and twenty-five business men. In several counties of this State labor agents were arrested for violating these laws.⁸⁵ Four Southern cities and as many States brought lawsuits against a great Northern railroad for violation of the laws and ordinances regarding the soliciting of labor to be sent

⁸² Snavely, T. R., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., pp. 64-64.

⁸³ Scott, E. J., *Negro Migration During The War*, pp. 72-73.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁸⁵ Woofter, T. J., Jr., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 86.

outside the boundaries of these respective cities and States.⁸⁶ In some instances also Negro assistants of railroad labor agents were maltreated, arrested, and heavily fined.⁸⁷ For example, at Thomasville, Georgia, a Negro and a white man were arrested on the charge of being labor agents.⁸⁸ In another case, at Sumter, South Carolina, a popular Negro minister who was found at the railroad station bidding farewell to some of his parishioners, who were leaving for the North, was arrested as a labor agent.⁸⁹

Besides these tirades against the labor agents, drastic methods were adopted to prevent the Negroes from going North. These were resorted to mainly by the police and were so executed as to discourage movement from the South. In some cities police officers visited railroad stations, rounded up Negroes by hundreds, and took them to prison on the flimsiest sort of accusations. On the days following such arrests, however, all the Negroes who had been thus imprisoned were released.⁹⁰ An example of this is the occurrence at Savannah, Georgia, where on one occasion the police arrested and jailed every Negro who happened to be in the station regardless of where he might have been going. Sometimes, as was done once at Albany, Georgia, they destroyed the tickets of migrants who were waiting to board trains for the North.⁹¹ At Greenville, Mississippi, it was the custom to stop trains, drag Negroes therefrom, and prevent others from boarding them. Strangers were subjected to search in order to secure evidence which might prove them to be labor agents.⁹² The ticket agent at Hattiesburg, Mississippi, until restrained by the general superintendent, attempted to interfere with the

⁸⁶ Tyson, F. D., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 121.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-23.

⁸⁸ Scott, E. J., *Negro Migration During The War*, p. 74.

⁸⁹ Williams, W. T. B., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 110.

⁹⁰ Horwill, H. W., *Contemp. Rev.*, 114: 301-302, Sept., 1918.

⁹¹ Williams, W. T. B., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 110.

⁹² Scott, E. J., *Negro Migration During The War*, p. 77.

movement by refusing to sell tickets to Negroes desiring to leave for the North.⁹³ Also, the Mayor of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, tried to check the movement by requesting the President of the Illinois Central Railroad to use his influence to stop this road from carrying Negroes to the North. To this request the President replied that, while he was opposed to the Negro migration, his road, as a common carrier, could not either refuse to sell tickets to the Negroes or fail to provide them the necessary means of transportation.⁹⁴ Moreover, many Negroes who were not migrants were subjected on every hand to arbitrary arrests on mere petty charges in order to intimidate and terrorize them.

These repressive measures apparently had no effect in checking the movement, for Negroes continued to move to the North in large numbers. When this was realized, a changed state of affairs followed. The better portion of the public opinion of those States affected by the migration condemned this policy of force as a means of stopping the exodus, on the one hand, and on the other suggested the adoption of measures which would conciliate the Negroes, and thereby remove those conditions causing them to leave the South. This was urged by some of the editors of leading newspapers, and by leaders of other social agencies interested in problems regarding the relations between the races in the South. These editors were for the most part very frank about the whole matter, and, therefore, did not hesitate to make it known that in order to check the movement there was need of a square deal for the Negro, higher wages, and a more sympathetic attitude toward the aspirations and general improvement of the Negro race.⁹⁵

The following excerpts from the editorials of a few of these papers will show what this opinion was. *The Charlotte Observer* said:

⁹³ Scott, E. J., *Negro Migration During The War*, p. 77.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁹⁵ Dillard, J. H., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 13.

"The real thing that started the exodus lies at the door of the farmer and is easily within his power to remedy. The Negro must be given better homes and better surroundings. Fifty years after the Civil War he should not be expected to be content with the same conditions which existed at the close of the War. We cannot blame him for no longer countenancing life in the windowless cabin, nor with being discontented with the same scale of remuneration for his labor that prevailed when farmers were unable to do anything better for him."⁹⁶

The Daily News of Jackson, Mississippi, moreover, had this to say:

"The Negro exodus is the most serious economic matter that confronts the people of Mississippi today. And it isn't worth while to sit around and cuss the labor agents either. That won't help us the least bit in getting to a proper solution. We may as well face the facts, even when the facts are very ugly and very much against us. The plain truth of the matter is the white people of Mississippi are not giving the Negro a square deal. And this applies not merely to Mississippi, but to all the other states in the South. How can we expect to hold our Negro labor when we are not paying decent living wages? Have we any right to abuse the Negro for moving to the Northern states where he is tempted by high wages when we are not paying him his worth at home? . . . Then, too, the Negro is not being given a square deal in the matter of education. In a majority of our rural districts especially the schools for Negro children are miserable makeshifts, the teacher often more ignorant than the pupils, little or nothing allowed for their support, and the children derive no benefits whatever. . . . The ugly fact remains that we have not been doing our duty by the Negro, and until we do there is no reason to hope for a better settlement of our industrial conditions."⁹⁷

The Progressive Farmer, too, another Southern organ, was of this opinion:

"Farm labor has always commanded smaller wages in the South than in other parts of the country. In 1910, the average monthly

⁹⁶ Williams, W. T. B., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 104.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

wage of male farm laborers in the South Atlantic States was only \$18.76, and in the South Central States, \$20.27, while in the North Atlantic and North Central States the average exceeded \$30, and in the Western States reached \$44.35. . . . We ought to face the competition of other sections, not by taxing and mobbing labor agents, but by treating our own labor so fairly that it will be willing to stay with us.''⁹⁸

Besides these we have the opinions of two other social agencies that were also in favor of the remedy of conciliation as a means of checking the exodus. These are the University Commission on Southern Race Questions and the Southern Sociological Congress. The former advocated as a check on the movement the giving to the Negroes a larger measure of those things which human beings hold dearer than material goods.⁹⁹ In its judgment some of these things were as follows: fair treatment, opportunity to labor and enjoy the legitimate fruits of labor, assurance of even-handed justice in the courts, good educational facilities, sanitary living conditions, tolerance, and sympathy. At its annual meeting in 1917 the Southern Sociological Congress expressed the belief that the movement could be stopped, not by repression, but by cooperation between peoples of both races.¹⁰⁰ Most of the speakers at this gathering recommended a getting together of the leaders of the whites and the blacks so that they might discuss the situation very frankly and thereby work out plans to ensure the Negro a square deal and a man's chance in the South.

These preceding views, however, were not at all the general opinion regarding the remedies to check the migration, for there was another element, representing the old South, which did not consider them with any degree of favor. It viewed the movement as a specific and temporary thing, and held that had there been no floods during 1916, and if the boll-weevil had not ravaged the cotton planta-

⁹⁸ Williams, W. T. B., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 110.

⁹⁹ Min. Univ. Com. on Southern Race Questions, pp. 48-48, 1917.

¹⁰⁰ *Survey*, 38: 428, Aug. 11, 1917.

tions, there would have been no migration, for the Negroes never would have been induced to go North. It alleged that the Negroes did not want more money, if the getting of it meant harder work; and that what the Negro needed was a soft climate. It also asserted that the relations between the two races were never so good as they were then. Hence this element favored standing aloof and allowing the movement to stop of its own accord.¹⁰¹

Notwithstanding this view of the situation, there prevailed the opinion that the remedy for checking the exodus lay in the adoption of those measures promotive of sympathy and kindness, and forthwith plans were effected with the aim of inducing the Negroes to remain and of inviting others who had departed to return to the South. The following are some of the chief measures which were adopted to achieve this end: (1) A general and substantial increase in wages; (2) movement on the part of the farmers to deal more fairly in business matters with the Negro tenants by making clear at the outset the terms of all contracts, and by keeping strict accounts and making prompt settlements with them; (3) the correcting of certain former abuses such as short weighing of coal, discounting of store checks, and unfair prices in the commissaries; (4) instituting of crop diversification in order to keep the laborers supplied with work the year round; (5) better housing; (6) better school conditions; and (7) the drawing closer together of the two races through the medium of county meetings for the study of problems growing out of racial relations. A typical example of this last-named policy is the "Community Congress" plan in Bolivar County, Mississippi. The essential feature of this body is a representative general committee composed of twenty-five white planters and business men, and five Negro leaders from the five supervisors' districts within the county. The function of this organization is to consider and offer solutions of any and all important problems pertaining to the community. There is, moreover, the Farm Extension

¹⁰¹ *Living Age*, 295: 58-59, Oct. 6, 1917.

Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce of Memphis, Tennessee, which was organized for the purpose of conducting educational campaigns to improve agricultural and rural conditions. This organization has extended its work from Tennessee into Mississippi and Arkansas, and has adopted the policy of employing Negroes to act as demonstrators among farmers of their own race in order to furnish the Negro farmers with greater incentive to become more skilful and industrious in their vocation.¹⁰²

Since we have seen the attitude of the white leaders of the South toward this movement, it might also be of interest to know what was the view of the Negro leaders in regard to this exodus of their race. In the first place, many of the local leaders in the South were much opposed to this movement, but hesitated to give outward expression to this for fear of rebuke from members of their race. Hence, their policy was that of maintaining silence about the whole matter. On the other hand, the editors of some of the leading Negro papers of the South were somewhat outspoken and were more or less inclined to be in sympathy with the movement. They nevertheless expressed regrets that the Negroes were leaving the South, but this did not in the least move them to do anything to help check the movement. They took the position that the migrants had not been given justice in economic, political, and social affairs, and that, therefore, they had no just grounds on which to base appeals to them to remain in the South. In fact, in view of these adverse circumstances, they felt that the Negroes could not be blamed for moving to the North.¹⁰³

Other leaders, however, especially those in the North, were more positive and frank as regards their attitude toward the movement. These may be roughly divided into two distinct classes, namely, the conservative and the radical. Those of the former class adhered largely to the

¹⁰² *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., pp. 15-113. See topics titled as follows: "Constructive Adjustments," "Means of Checking the Exodus," "Constructive Possibilities," and "Initial Remedies."

¹⁰³ Baker, R. S., *World's Work*, 34: 316, July, 1919.

view of Tuskegee Institute, which fosters the traditions of Booker T. Washington.¹⁰⁴ They advised the Negroes to remain in the South on the ground that it was there only that the Negro could become a landholder, and that there were chances for him to become a real estate owner almost at his own will. Some in this class felt also that the Great War would soon end and that after that the country would be flooded by immigrants from Europe, who would doubtless deprive thousands of Negroes of work in the North. They therefore counseled the Negroes to stay at home and to keep possession of their property, especially their property in land.

The radicals, on the other hand, who insist on equal rights for the race, boldly advised and urged the Negroes to come North. When this exodus was well under way one of the members of this class, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, spoke as follows: "There are not jobs for everybody; there is no demand for the lazy and casual; but trained, honest Negro laborers are welcome in the North at good wages just as they are lynched in the South for impudence. Take your choice."¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, others of this class, believing that immigration would not be a factor in the labor situation for a long time to come, likewise urged the Negroes to continue moving to the North. Their desire was to see the Negro population increase its size in such great proportions through this migration as to afford it the opportunity to exercise in the North economic and political power hitherto unknown.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *Living Age*, 295: 59, Oct. 6, 1917.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ Woodson, C. G., *A Century of Negro Migration*, p. 176.